

OUR POWER



PATHWAYS TO COMMUNITY PROSPERITY



FEBRUARY 2021

IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?
The goal of this report is to provide information about the current state of the affordable housing market in the United States. It is intended to be a resource for community developers, advocates, and policymakers who are working to address the affordable housing crisis. The report provides an overview of the current state of the affordable housing market, including a discussion of the challenges facing the market and the role of government in addressing these challenges. It also provides a list of resources for more information about the affordable housing market and the role of government in addressing these challenges.



Photo Credit: Center for Neighborhood Technology

OUR POWER

The deficiencies and inequality of our economy, housing, healthcare, infrastructure, educational system, and climate inaction have been exposed at this critical point in American history. The United States has failed to put in place equitable policies to address numerous crippling crises amid the COVID-19 pandemic and a national reckoning on race.

Low-income and people of color are suffering most, with millions of families on the verge of eviction and homelessness, struggling to pay rent and buy food, and losing their businesses and livelihoods. Wildfires, floods, hurricanes and other climate disasters have meantime ravaged the country amid government inaction on climate change. Racist systems persist as millions watch brazen instances of police brutality against Black people, as well as the cruel separation of thousands of Latino children from their parents at our borders. We have seen government at both the national and local levels fail to support families and workers at a time when social safety systems have been drained dry.

With clarity and conviction, partners in the Strong Prosperous and Resilient Communities Challenge (SPARCC) put forward the following pathways to community prosperity to emphatically demand better. We believe in our collective power to realize a racially just and restorative future for our communities and our planet.



OUR PLATFORM

The Strong, Prosperous and Resilient Communities Challenge (SPARCC) is a multiyear initiative investing in and amplifying local efforts in Atlanta, the San Francisco Bay Area, Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles and Memphis to ensure that public investments in the built environment reduce racial disparities, build a culture of health, and respond to the climate crisis. This policy platform is created by national and community-based partners from those six regions. It is a living document that represents four years of collective work and collaboration to confront the ongoing issues at the intersection of race, climate and health. Our goal in creating this document is to articulate and guide our SPARCC work to influence local and national policy advocacy and ensure our goals are in alignment with local work and community needs.

We organized this platform to:

- Center race and elevate intersectional policies that advance health equity and climate justice.
- Focus on the immediate needs of people and communities and elevate local ideas for equitable and just recovery and development.
- Offer recommendations to achieve greater local control and community ownership
- Serve as a tool for coordination and collaboration between local and national partners.
- Advance policies that are implementable and actionable across the collective SPARCC communities and across various local, state and national levels.

Through our policy and program recommendations we engage with community residents, national, state and local public officials, non-profit organizations, and those connected to community development, including as funders, to influence equitable solutions that fall under four focus areas:



Restorative and Regenerative Economy. Focused on a future where the lives, leadership, dreams, and brilliance of Black, Indigenous, and all people of color (BIPOC) are supported and enhanced by an economic system that is democratic, just and adaptive. **Page 6**



Housing as a Human Right. Focused on creating a housing system that is community-centered, environmentally sustainable and healthy, where everyone has a safe, accessible and affordable home. **Page 11**



Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD). Focused on policies, processes and a development approach that facilitates equitable development near transit serving the needs of existing residents, cultures and businesses. ETOD must affirm the rights and dignity of those who rely on transit and the value of transit-served communities. **Page 21**



Parks and Open Space Equity. Focused on access to parks and open spaces designed by the communities they serve, in conjunction with anti-displacement strategies for healthy and equitable communities amid the current and future realities of climate change. **Page 28**



The following offers recommendations that serve a larger ecosystem of policies and programs needed for more just and sustainable communities.

Each section was created by a SPARCC work group composed of representatives from national and local organizations across the six SPARCC regions. Like communities themselves, each section has a slightly different format and focus. Each reflects the many conversations that took place during both the trauma and social uprising of the past year.

This policy platform does not represent the totality of possibilities. Rather it includes those areas where SPARCC partners are already at work, and where greater local, state and national advocacy will be required for the next months and years.





CALL TO FEDERAL LEADERS

There is an **urgent need** for bold action by Congress and the Biden-Harris administration to provide [long-overdue assistance](#) to help families avoid eviction or foreclosure worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic crisis, and the unfolding environmental crisis. In the coming months, Congress must:

- 1. Strengthen and extend the eviction moratorium and protections for tenants.** This would include providing emergency financial assistance that supports families and essential workers regardless of naturalization status, small businesses (including landlords of small properties), community health and social services centers and public transportation agencies through 2021.
- 2. Ensure universal access to clean water and energy** by implementing a national and comprehensive moratorium on energy and water utility shut offs with support for late fee waivers, safe reconnections, debt relief, assistance and protections for low-income customers, with clear communication in multiple languages.
- 3. Fund long term community ownership** in order to prevent foreclosures and predatory acquisition of single-family homes, small scale multi-family units, apartments and neighborhood commercial properties. Fund opportunities to retain and increase individual and collective ownership of housing, businesses, local parks and open spaces, and other community uses among community organizations and residents.
- 4. Provide immediate assistance for communities devastated by natural disasters augmented by human activity** like historic wildfires, hurricanes, and other extreme events that have affected communities coast to coast, and in Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands.
- 5. Reevaluate and rebalance budgets to cut spending on militarized police forces** and reinvest in a shared, moral vision of safety, infrastructure and recovery that puts families and communities first.

Long term, we also call for the federal government to:

- 1. Listen to the community's vision for itself** to fund anti-displacement measures, infrastructure, healthy housing, parks and fair-paying jobs that ensure economic opportunity, housing stability, access to quality health services and empowerment of the most vulnerable.
- 2. Create a federal framework that recognizes health as a human right** with funding mechanisms under community control for health equity anchor institutions such as community medical centers and universities.
- 3. Transition to a restorative and just carbon-free economy** that uplifts frontline communities and includes workforce development, community ownership and sustainability to beneficial all.
- 4. Support and implement reparations and racial reconciliation** for Black and Indigenous communities.

PAST AS PRELUDE

COMMUNITY POWER IN THE FACE OF STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

This policy platform was conceived and written in the context of 2020—a year that has tested our collective mettle with unprecedented job loss, climate instability, increased prejudice and attacks on Asian Americans, persistent racial unrest and an unimaginable number of deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic. We also know that 2020 is not a standalone year in which random forces conspired to create racial injustices: This country is built on a long history of structural violence toward Black and Brown bodies.

The American Civil War did not end the enslavement of Black and Brown people. Slavery has evolved and been perpetuated through the over-criminalization of Black and Brown people be it through high profile efforts like the “War on Drugs” or even every day local policies such as jaywalking enforcement. More tragic is the systemic suppression, disenfranchisement, and killing of Black and Brown people by increasingly militarized police who are supposed to protect and serve.

These years of systemic oppression by police came to a(nother) head early in 2020, with the state-sponsored murder of Breonna Taylor who was killed in a hail of bullets by police unlawfully entering her home and of George Floyd who suffocated to death by a police officer who mercilessly kneeled on his neck for 7 minutes and 46 seconds. The latter was filmed and distributed around the globe sparking outrage. It would ultimately bring about the largest movement in decades in support and solidarity for the humanity of Black lives in this country and defunding of a flawed police system.

Peaceful protestors gathered across this country repeating the phrase that George Floyd and Eric Garner before him uttered before their deaths by the hands of police – “I can’t breathe.” Unfortunately, this is a scene all too familiar for Black Americans. For centuries Black people have pleaded for the United States to get their knee off of the necks of Black people so that they too can seek life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Yet the brutality persists.



Police brutality is an ongoing crisis that plagues Black communities with minimal accountability for American police forces and minimal justice served for victims. In 2020 alone police killed 1,127 people—28 percent of those killed were Black, despite representing 13 percent of the population. Equally as troubling is only 1 percent of killings by police have resulted in criminal charges filed against police officers involved.

There is growing evidence linking police brutality rates to racial segregation. Researchers were able to correlate levels of segregation as the largest predictor of the ratio of police shootings of Black victims when compared to white victims. It is past time that we acknowledge the intersectionality of race, class, justice, and mass incarceration that has led us to this critical point. We can no longer ignore the obvious – we must reimagine policing in our communities in a way that truly serves and protects.

The injustices experienced by Black and Brown people from our corrupt police system are also replicated in nearly all essential services including basic systems for housing, medical care, equitable transportation, parks and open space, and a restorative economy that provides opportunity and a fair, livable wage.

With a renewed spirit and an undying sense of urgency we put forward this document to promote the liberation of the least of these and advocate for the most marginalized of our society.

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To the poor, working class, the differently abled, the elderly, the disenfranchised, LGBTQ+, Black, Indigenous, Latino, Multi-racial, Asian, and Pacific Islander:

we see you, you matter and we claim our right to breathe and our right to hold power.”





Photo Credit: Center for Neighborhood Technology
Artist Credit: Darius C. Dennis

A RESTORATIVE AND REGENERATIVE ECONOMY

WE envision a future where the lives, leadership, expertise, goals and intelligence of low-income and Black, Indigenous, Latino, Asian and Pacific-Islanders and all people of color are supported and enhanced by an economic system that is democratic, just and adaptive. This economic system is based on abundance and communal self-determination for communities of color and all people. It acknowledges the restoration and healing necessary to repair relationships and create sustainable resilience that allows regeneration to be possible. This system recognizes the interrelationship between oneself, the environment, and the greater community and that advancing intersectional work is how we will achieve collective prosperity.

for its victims but creates a system that perpetuates poverty, marginalization, poor health and an economic burden that hurts everyone.

The term **restorative economy** was coined by Nwamaka Agbo and is:

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an invitation for communities to come together and form relationships that allow them to reimagine a new way of being grounded in cooperation instead of competition, inclusion instead of exclusion, and abundance instead of scarcity.

~Nwamaka Agbo

OUR CHALLENGE

Our current economic system requires hierarchy, oppression, and extraction to operate and maintain itself. It divides people according to race, class, ableism, and gender, and often treats Black and Brown people, people who identify as LGBTQ+, poor people, the differently abled and the natural environment as expendable resources. This treatment has an impact that causes not only emotional burnout and psychological trauma





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Great results can be achieved when creativity is merged with an intention to serve communities in need. Using cultural and historic elements of an existing community to establish local circular economies not only reinforces local identity for the people and the place but has potential to restore health and well-being of that community, especially when diverse demographic groups in the community are intentionally connected for both economic benefit and social support.

Miné H Hashas-Degertekin,
Kennesaw State University, Atlanta



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Build from the Ground Up with an Emphasis on Relationships

Hyper-local and community-driven solutions are essential to a restorative and regenerative economy. Community enterprises that build true community power and shared wealth, such as cooperative and employee ownership, will be crucial to recovery from COVID-19. This includes a number of tangible actions:

Supporting intergenerational spaces for connection, storytelling, and restorative activities that acknowledge and identify pain points, strengthen and build relationships and imagine new opportunities.

Supporting closed-loop economies that circulate financial and non-financial resources to serve basic needs and invest in housing, urban farms, grocery stores, community health centers, and community businesses.

Facilitating processes that support the creation of local cooperative businesses and conversion to co-op structures, especially in low-income and communities of color for sustainable wealth generation. This can be done by providing education, technical assistance, and investment to those businesses that are interested in developing or converting to cooperative structures.

Supporting owners and workers of existing and recently shuttered local businesses, with priority given to legacy businesses owned by people of color and the undocumented.

Creating programs meant specifically to assist businesses in generating capital to sustain operations and also to build out programs for tailored technical assistance that focus on building business plans, navigating bureaucratic systems, building management and leadership capacity, and developing products.

Supporting a cultural equity plan that maps assets, access to arts and culture resources, and lays out cultural investment and cultural preservation strategies. Developing a ground-up cultural economy plan enables investment that strengthens the cultural vibrancy of the local economy.

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One thing has become clear this year –entrepreneurs of color are essential to the fabric of our community and real efforts must be made to ensure they can adapt to the future. Whether it's an international pandemic or the closer-to-home effects of climate change and displacement, MHC partner efforts have included providing direct cash assistance, mobilizing business owners, and advocating for city action to drive local investment towards our community businesses.

Deya Zavala,
Mile High Connects, Denver



2. Increase Non-Extractive Lending.

Community lending and capital strategies should not harm nor place an undue burden of collateral or extractive debt on BIPOC residents and business owners. As a SPARCC network, our role is to both advance non-extractive capital strategies and lift up these strategies as capital partners. Activities should include:

Convening community leaders interested in understanding capital systems and translating community lending to credit-building efforts.

Supporting policy changes to allow micro-businesses, entrepreneurs and cooperatives to fundraise and develop other creative and regenerative community capital strategies.

Integrating lending resources to create healthy, green and climate resilient community structures using renewable resources without compromising affordability.

Accelerating work by community development financial institutions (CDFI's) to invest in technical and financial assistance to support emerging BIPOC banks and credit unions, as well as small community lenders.

Across the country we are seeing new models of community wealth-building strategies that are worth investing in to scale to increase their impact, such as:

- **Community investment trusts** (e.g. [East Portland Community Investment Trust](#) offers residents a path to collective community ownership of real estate from \$10 - \$100 per month. Residents must take the Moving from Owing to Owning class and work through a framework of learn, invest and profit.)
- **Community Owned Real Estate (CORE)** (i.e. a Los Angeles-based collaborative model to preserve small businesses in gentrifying neighborhoods.) This model is part shared equity and part community land trust which creates a pathway for tenants to join the ownership group of the property they work in. (Source: [Inclusive Action](#))
- **Community solar and cooperative models of renewable energy**, district water and district energy models and models of mixed-use community land trust with green space (see examples in [The Sustainable Square Mile Handbook](#), by Blacks in Green and the Natural Resources Defense Council.)

3. Center Restorative Justice and Other Healing Practices

Healing and restoration must be at the forefront of our way forward given the current toll on the earth's resources and human capital and capacity. This requires **allocating health care and arts funding to address trauma and health disparities. Arts and culture interventions are a powerful alternative to mainstream methods used to address systemic issues such as criminal justice and safety.** The use of arts and cultural engagements (e.g., drumming, talking circles, theater) to change the impact of scarcity, trauma and environmental degradation to prosperity, health and sustainability, especially at the local and hyper-local levels.



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2020 has forced us to reimagine all systems, so CCWB is taking advantage of this opportunity to accelerate action towards a regenerative economy that keeps our wealth in our communities. This means working with place-based institutions on helping them identify ways to use their economic power to support our local businesses and cooperatives in addition to supporting local businesses and cooperatives to not just survive this brutal year, but also build their capacity to adapt to a changing market. This is not an act of charity, but rather, the recognition that it makes business sense to invest in our communities.

Yessica Holguin,
Center for Community Wealth Building & MHC Partner



Photo Credit: Center for Neighborhood Technology

Artist Credit: Rahmann Statik

4. Re-orient Philanthropic Funds for Community Development

There are a variety of financial resources that can support community work, none of which currently stand alone, but each of which need to be right-sized from the hyper-local to regional scales. This includes a number of changes, including how philanthropy engages and prioritizes its resources. Among these are:

Influencing and diversifying the uses of philanthropic funds to serve as a catalyst for community wealth-building by investing in community-based and community-owned trusts.

Changes to grant scoring criteria among federal and philanthropic partners to center investment into Black, Indigenous and communities of color by organizations led by people of color.

Revising underwriting processes to allow for investment in shared governance and collective ownership of commercial and residential properties.

Providing targeted engagement and organizing funds to local and emerging artists and cultural organizations that are trusted in serving diverse language, cultural and disability communities.

Creating flexible funding guidelines that allow for innovation through cultural and artistic approaches.

Designating grant and capital funds to reflect demographics to ensure cultural services in all communities.

5. Expand Opportunities for Communities to Connect in Healthy, Vibrant and Green Spaces

Parks, plazas and open green spaces can serve as catalysts for social, artistic and educational enrichment and often serve as hubs for regenerative economic activities such as local food production.

Events and other programming in parks should provide the opportunity to tell the historical and cultural stories of the first Indigenous stewards of the land and underserved communities, and offer a platform for intercultural relationships.

Cultural and recreational assets can be linked through sidewalks, trails and bikeways that create safe access for low-income communities and communities of color.

At the local level, **cities and regions should prioritize infrastructure investments** that create circular, interconnected green systems to capture energy and water waste and reduce negative health impacts.

Local policies should include a focus on the health impact and economic value of green infrastructure in ensuring benefits reach existing community members and not cause displacement.





Photo Credit: Julie Jung

SPARCC provided some money to the Street Vendor Emergency Fund, which helped to support in total 1,296 vendors with \$400 unrestricted cash, all on these cash cards.

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Sidewalk vendors are an integral part of our local economies. Legalizing their businesses provides protection and integration into economic systems they have long been barred from. Investing in these entrepreneurs is investing in the needs of communities that have not received their fair share of goods and services due to historical disinvestment.

Lyric Kelkar,
Inclusive Action, Los Angeles



Photo Credit: Rudy Espinoza



Photo: Mariposa, Denver, Enterprise Community Partners

HOUSING AS A HUMAN RIGHT

WE envision a system that embraces housing as critical community infrastructure and as a human right essential to health and well-being. We call for a community-centered, environmentally sustainable and healthy housing system where everyone has a safe, accessible and affordable home.

Housing policy and investment must prioritize the leadership, ideas and needs of low-income and Black, Indigenous, Latino, Asian and Pacific-Islanders and all people of color who together have power and access to adaptive financial resources to transform racially and economically unjust systems. It should address community needs across a spectrum, with a mix of choice and mobility for affordable housing that includes rental, limited equity and shared ownership arrangements, community ownership, and homeownership with access to community assets, including quality green space, medical services, transportation and fresh food. Local leaders and entrepreneurs together with regional networks must be empowered with the necessary resources to build community wealth and retain control at the neighborhood level.

A home, like the earth herself, is a foundational shell whose condition and accessibility is critical to quality of life.

OUR CHALLENGE

For too long we've had a housing system that does not serve us all. The rising cost of housing has left millions of people homeless, or burdened by untenable debt, or living in conditions that are unhealthy, unsafe and unsustainable. Low-income, Black, Indigenous, Latino, Asian and Pacific Islanders and people of color particularly have endured the impact of a housing model that facilitates economic profitability for those with existing financial resources and assets at the expense of the human need for and the right to shelter.

Housing has evolved into a major commodity. Over the last two decades, we have witnessed historical disinvestment in communities of color amid the rise of real estate development with no regard for affordability for existing residents, leading to massive physical and cultural displacement and gentrification. At the same time, development in flood zones, in exurban



areas lacking infrastructure or transit, and near polluted sites, hurt people's health and livelihoods while also contributing to climate change and putting more people in harm's way.

The American Dream via homeownership has not materialized for millions of low-income, Black, Indigenous, Latino, Asian and Pacific Islanders and people of color. In fact, institutionalized racism, redlining and segregation have caused an intentional and systematic devaluation of communities of color, limiting the trajectory for wealth that has benefited white households over generations. Homes in Black communities are undervalued by [an average of \\$48,000](#). Communities of color are limited by a lack of debt-free funding and predatory investment practices that squeeze out legacy property owners, small landlords and mission-driven and community-centered housing developers.

Where we live is the cornerstone for accessing good jobs, quality education, clean air, clean water, fresh food choices, and transportation. Resource-rich neighborhoods cannot be reserved for the few or cut off by the impacts of segregation. Healthy, resilient and affordable housing is a right we all share.

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The community land trust model is all about shifting the mindset of owning land to make a profit to stewarding the land to protect a community's history and culture.



Magaly Cruz,
Center for Transforming Communities,
Memphis



Various Artists including: KAYO, ZEKO, ZO, DOC, Lil D, Wow Wow, Ro, To, Veil, Geo, and more



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Build Power: Enable Community Control, Ownership and Wealth Creation

Increase collective ownership of land by enabling shared equity models of housing such as community land trusts and limited equity cooperatives. This is essential to removing land from the speculative market and moving it into community control, while building community power and ensuring permanent affordability.

SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS

Provide federal resources to shared-equity housing models like community land trusts serving low-income and Black, Brown and Indigenous communities through a public equity model like U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) [Neighborhood Stabilization Program](#). These funds could provide resources for community organizations, and mission-driven organizations to purchase and maintain properties, with ability to transfer to resident-led community control structures. Funds would immediately support keeping people in homes and businesses as a counter to the eviction and foreclosure impacts from COVID-19 and would address habitability issues such as health, safety and climate resilience. Funds would cover bank rent, seed capital, pre-development costs, acquisition-rehab funding, operating subsidies and be available to local and tribal governments.

Create the conditions for shared equity models to succeed by implementing supportive policies and programs, including:

- Municipal right-of-first-refusal policies and extension of long term-affordability covenants between 60 - 99 years.
- Small sites funding programs as a separate pool of housing gap sources to support acquisitions, allowing programs to be tailored to the needs of the pace of the small property market.

- Monitoring expiring federally subsidized units with an explicitly intervention strategy to support the preservation of units and/or conversion to shared equity models as determined by community housing needs.
- Leveraging publicly owned and vacant land for community land trusts and co-ops.
- Identifying a coordinating entity and funding streams to consistently link healthy and green investments with shared-equity models of ownership and other investments in affordable housing, transportation, economic opportunity, and other community needs.

Increase lending from community development financial institutions (CDFIs) and philanthropy to small projects, small developers and shared-equity models by providing CDFIs with flexible and forgivable resources that can finance projects and borrowers traditionally considered more risky.

Increase collaboration among small and large CDFIs as well as national, local and crowdsourced grants and program-related investments for projects.

Support networks to share information, provide technical assistance and fund learning opportunities on the development, funding and governance of shared equity models.



LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

Encourage long-term commitments from local governments to keep a significant percentage of land and housing out of the speculative market.

Advocate to increase community leadership in public housing decisions, for example, by increasing the number of public housing authorities which use a land trust and social housing framework instead of a traditional “authority” model that offers a top-down approach.

Restore the federal housing budget and create alternatives to state-level redevelopment funds, all of which could support innovative ownership structures.

Provide more education and training about the land trust model with community members and the public sector to increase understanding and dispel myths.



Photo: Simon Cotton

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For generations, the private capital system has starved people of color of the financial resources that would allow them to become strong, prosperous, and resilient. Government intervention has been ineffective at best in inducing investment in and with people (not neighborhoods) of color. Providing equity-like capital to organizations and entrepreneurs of color allows them to own and shape their communities.

Devin Culbertson,
Enterprise Community Partners



2. Protect Renters, Homeowners and Community Stewards from Displacement Resulting from Gentrification, or from Climate-Related or Man-Made Disasters Including Sustained Community Disinvestment

TYPES OF DISPLACEMENT

DEVELOPMENT-INDUCED:

Increased land values, rising housing prices and property taxes, and increased rents all create pressures on low-income homeowners and renters. Involuntary displacement occurs as rents increase faster than incomes. Increased market pressures also amplify eviction rates, many without just cause, as landlords realize the opportunity to charge higher rents. Commercial leases also increase during this process. Gentrification also fuels increased market speculation and the conversion or demolition of more affordable commercial and housing products into different or higher-value uses. **Green gentrification** also occurs when green and climate-related investments like large scale parks and trails increase land values without protective measures to keep people in place, displacing residents who are priced out of the community.

CLIMATE-RELATED:

Extreme weather events such as hurricanes, flooding, sea level rise, tornadoes or wildfires create direct long-term displacement and destruction. These events can initially create short-term displacement but many low-income renters and homeowners find they are unable to return to their communities, with existing federal disaster recovery policies biased toward higher-income homeowners. Smaller scale but more frequent climate-related displacement also occurs due to increased urban flooding, sea level rise, higher insurance costs, and market pressure by more affluent households. Some of these issues create additional maintenance and homeownership costs that become too burdensome for existing low-income homeowners, leading to displacement.

DISINVESTMENT-INDUCED AND MAN-MADE DISASTER DISPLACEMENT:

Economic crises such as the 2008 housing foreclosure recession displaced many low-income homeowners who lost their home and wealth-building assets, creating long-term economic hardships. Many have not been able to recover. The homeownership rate for Black Americans is at an all-time low. In many Black, Latino, AAPI, Indigenous and low-income communities across the country, sustained disinvestment by the public and private sectors also is a catalyst for displacement. Homes continue to lose value and the cost of maintenance or rehab cannot be recovered from market-rate rents or property values. Subsequent displacement from lack of integrated investments in communities, housing and jobs also increases vulnerability to climate and health impacts. Residents choose to leave their neighborhoods seeking better quality housing and neighborhoods with better quality of life.



SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS

Strengthen the federal eviction moratorium and foreclosure forbearance while providing federal emergency financial assistance to renters and small landlords. Ensure eligibility of federal funding for states and localities to establish financial assistance programs to cover delinquent rent/mortgages and utility bills for households impacted by COVID-19. Several states used COVID-19 funding to provide this type of assistance, but specific federal eligibility and guidance should be provided to ensure that this critically needed support is provided to all in need. (HUD, Treasury and state governments)

Advocate for local programs to provide rent relief and other funding incentives to low-income homeowners (under 80% AMI) so that households can make needed maintenance repairs, including to mitigate against climate impacts and to make energy efficiency improvements. (Local governments)

Increase federal funding for legal aid to assist tenants facing eviction, and to ensure that legal counsel and guidance is provided in multiple languages. Locally, connect tenants to legal clinics for counsel in cases of an eviction and forced lease agreement changes and increase source of income protections (Department of Justice and local advocates, philanthropy, and county courts)

Prioritize programs to help Black, Brown and Indigenous people become homeowners. Support should include enhanced down payment assistance programs, credit help and alternative credit assessments. (Local governments in collaboration with philanthropy, private lenders, CDFIs and community development corporations)

Accelerate community-ownership models and acquisitions. Congress should fund a program, as mentioned in the section above, to help stabilize neighborhoods and provide funding to community-based organizations, CDFIs and local governments to purchase affordable homes and multi-family properties to maintain long-term affordability through community-ownership models.

Prioritize anti-displacement strategies with agencies (parks, transit, housing) engaged in development decisions that threaten to displace residents and provide funding for the community organizations that implement those strategies.

Increase funding for mental health support focused on displacement and housing-related health stressors (social determinants of health). Support arts and culture organizations to provide healing and restoration as part of housing and health-related support.

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

STATE AND LOCAL PROGRAMS OR POLICY CHANGES

Create and/or increase funding for state and local Housing Trust Funds with a dedicated revenue source. Housing Trust Funds with a dedicated revenue source represent one path to additional resources. Trust funds can be very flexible and fund rental assistance programs as well as housing development.

Encourage philanthropic entities to make program-related investments (PRIs) to CDFIs to support financing land acquisition, affordable housing preservation, down payment assistance and other investments to support community-ownership and increase BIPOC home ownership rates, and to aid the creation of a Renters' Right Association or Union to advocate for policy change and landlord accountability.



Advocate for state and local policies that give enhanced [legal protection to tenants](#), such as:

- Right to counsel, which gives tenants facing eviction a right to an attorney in court, decreasing the chances of eviction
- Statewide anti-harassment laws to protect tenants who request repairs or report code violations
- Policies that legally protect renters and tenants from unlawful eviction, mistreatment and uninhabitable homes.

Provide income-based tax waivers (or tax freezes) for low-income homeowners, such as a property tax “circuit breaker” that caps the amount of property tax that homeowners have to pay as a share of their income, much like the electric circuit breaker which provides protection against overloading an electrical system.

Enact local/state policies to prevent rent gouging by limiting rent increases (i.e., max of \$50/month), especially during periods following natural, public health, or economic disasters; and limiting rent increases after the acquisition of properties.

Increase state and local acquisition resources and adopt local policies such as Right of First Refusal for public housing authorities and the prioritization of local affordable housing developers, community land trusts, and/or community land banks that can purchase and keep properties as long-term affordable units.

FEDERAL FUNDING AND PROGRAMS

Increase federal [HOME](#) funding which can be used for shared equity models and community land trusts. State and local governments can support these ownership models by using federal HOME funds for grants or below-market rate loans for project financing or by considering ways to use bond financing capacity to provide needed financing. (HUD)

Create an Interagency Task Force for Tenant and Renter Protections (similar to the Interagency Council on Homelessness) and increase federal funding to provide local resources that support tenant organizing and educational outreach on tenant rights. (White House, HUD)

Implement income-based weatherization and energy efficiency repair funding programs to support legacy and heir-property homeowners with needed repairs, rehab and upgrades to improve climate resiliency and reduce housing costs. Create specific funding for community-based organizations to provide technical assistance and outreach to expand utilization of these programs. (HUD, Department of Energy (DOE))

Create a federal tax incentive for landlords to preserve market-rate, unsubsidized affordable housing (often referred to as naturally occurring affordable housing or NOAH) and to make needed repairs and energy upgrades with tax credit conditioned upon maintaining current rents. (U.S. Dept. of Treasury)

Formalize eviction moratorium and mortgage forbearance, a standard component of a federal disaster declaration, to protect renters and create a more standardized expectation and understanding of what such a declaration means for renters and landlords. This declaration should include the eligibility of disaster funds to provide emergency rental assistance. (Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), HUD, White House)



3. Enable Healthy and Environmentally Sustainable Homes and Neighborhoods as a Standard that is Universally Accessible to Low-Income and Communities of Color

GUARANTEE ALL LEVELS OF UNIVERSAL ACCESSABILITY

RESIDENT LEVEL:



Low-income residents and residents of color do not have to choose between health and affordability in their homes and are empowered to act when asserting their rights to a safe, habitable home.

BUILDING LEVEL:



Physical structures promote residents' health and well being and are free of environmental stressors, and incorporate energy and water efficiency, and climate resilience.

NEIGHBORHOOD LEVEL:



Communities of color and low-income communities are adjacent to healthy land uses that promote good air quality, potable water, access to fresh foods, and are built or retrofitted to adapt to climate risks such as flooding, sea level rise, heat and wildfires.

SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS

Require policy makers and developers to adopt a national Health in All Policies (HiAP) framework to consider health impacts of housing plans, policies, programs and developments throughout the process.

Address unhealthy building conditions (e.g., mold, lead-based paint, lack of weatherization, unsafe electrical, etc.) through adoption of science-based standards and increased funding for code enforcement activities, and proactive rental inspection programs.

Prioritize policies for new affordable housing located in asset-rich areas (with transit, broadband, schools, libraries, healthy food, parks) and that includes health-promoting elements (health centers, gardens, active design elements, etc.).

Fund tenant counseling to help people learn about and assert their rights to a habitable home, paired with broader tenant protection policies. Nationally, expand tenant protections and tenant rights to counsel as a universal standard, and increase enforcement of violations by landlords.

Increase funding for COVID-19 related home improvements given the increased need to be in a safe and healthy shelter:

- *Provide grants* for in-home environmental assessments to improve air circulation and filtration
- *Provide emergency rental and mortgage assistance* to prevent displacement and reduce the likelihood of families entering and remaining in unsafe housing conditions



Expand inter-agency coordination with HUD, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Department of Transportation (DOT), Department of Interior (DOI) and other agencies with housing-related programs to ensure a coordinated national strategy promoting safe, healthy, affordable and energy efficient housing.

Increase funding for energy efficiency and weatherization programs such as the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) and clean water programs.

Increase the priority of greening housing as a standard in federal grants like the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and Choice Neighborhoods. Incorporate funding for enhancing tree cover, flood control and protection, rainwater catchment, and funding community resident training programs for neighborhood-level flooding.

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

Retrofit existing public housing to green, healthy and efficient housing, using on-site renewable resources integrated with green jobs strategies.

Expand low and middle-income rent subsidy + tax credit programs and adopt rent stabilization standards to increase housing affordability, thereby reducing rent burden and its negative health effects (overcrowding, spending tradeoffs, displacement, etc.).

Reform the National Flood Insurance Program through proactive buyouts and increased data transparency, while protecting low and moderate-income homeowners from excessive rate hikes.

Reverse racist and classist zoning and land use practices which have placed homes and schools, primarily Black and Brown communities, near landfills, refineries and power plants. Integrate a [Just Transition](#) framework during this process.



Photo: Pat Milbery



4. Preserve Existing Affordable Housing

Preservation occurs when our government and other institutions take action to ensure housing remains affordable, safe and accessible for households of all income levels and people are able to live within their means. Access to housing stability is critical to wealth generation among renters because it allows households to remain in a healthy, safe community. Quality, affordable, accessible housing can stabilize the broader neighborhood, which has positive impacts for all residents.

PRESERVATION OF EXISTING AFFORDABLE UNITS

Increase funding for the Public Housing Operating Fund, HOME Program, rural, Low Income Housing Tax Credit, and other programs that directly support preservation and production.

Increase funding for the Family Self-Sufficiency program.

Create a universal standard to provide pro-bono eviction lawyers to help preserve housing affordability and prevent excessive rent increases.

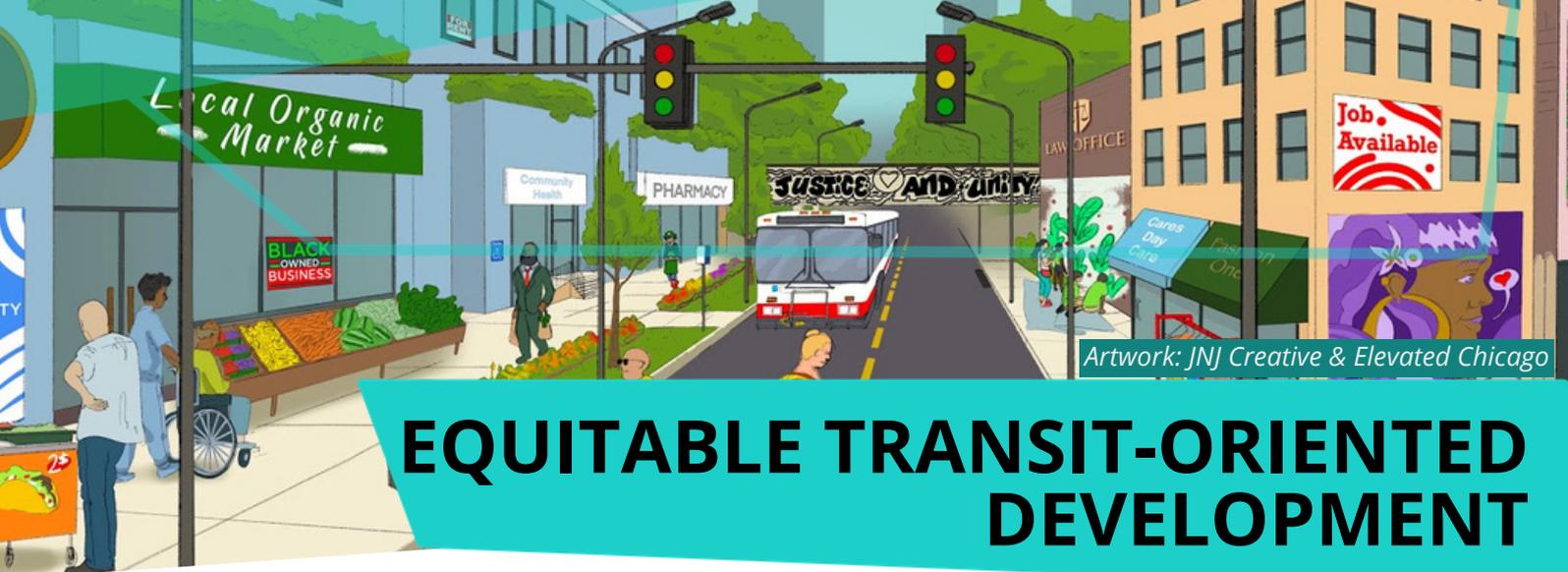
Upgrade and legalize unpermitted units (ADUs, basements, sheds, etc.) to preserve and improve existing housing stock, while protecting tenants from retaliation and landlords from excessive fines (amnesty programs, technical assistance).

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Health justice is the fundamental issue of our time. [This includes] how we ensure health protections during COVID-19, and how we continue to advance the long term work of reducing disparities in life expectancy. We only serve long term disparities by creating the living conditions that create health, including reasonably priced housing, opportunities for living wage work or to start businesses, and support for all of our children.

Melissa Jones,
Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative (BARHII)





Artwork: JNJ Creative & Elevated Chicago

EQUITABLE TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

WE believe Equitable Transit-Oriented Development is a policy, process and a development form that facilitates equitable development serving the needs of existing community residents and stakeholders, especially the most vulnerable. ETOD is centered on the people who live, work and create in communities of color and in low-income communities that are served by existing or planned high-capacity transit service, whether bus and/or rail. As our communities recover from the simultaneous racial justice, public health, housing and climate crises we currently face,

ETOD can be an important strategy to create a healthy, climate resilient and equitable future for all while also generating economic value and providing more public services more cost effectively.

Our cities and regions rely on the workers and families who reside in transit oriented communities. They fuel our economy, enrich our culture, and create the backbone of resilient communities. The recent COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated how dependent our communities are on the essential workers that keep our hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, grocery stores, mail service and delivery companies running. Many of those workers depend on public transportation to access their jobs. ETOD affirms the rights of those who rely on transit, and the value of transit-served communities. This manifests itself through:

- Housing that is affordable to people at a range of incomes, regardless of their household size, race, gender, physical ability or ethnicity.
- Residents, including the most vulnerable, who are physically safe from traffic, community violence and police harassment or brutality.
- Accessible pathways and sidewalks that connect people regardless of their physical ability or age to reliable, convenient transit and other green mobility options like bicycling, walking and car-sharing.
- Mixed-use neighborhoods where small, locally-owned businesses can thrive next to daycare and community centers, schools, libraries, community gardens and parklets, light manufacturing and housing.
- Shared economic prosperity through resident-driven creation and preservation of place that stimulates growth, offers pathways to community ownership, provides culturally relevant spaces and places for BIPOC residents, and unlocks self-determination.
- Vibrant neighborhoods where art and culture celebrate, honor, and elevate the City's multi-racial identities while affirming the rights of Black and Brown residents as cornerstones of our future.
- Sustainable building design and the inclusion of green spaces and natural climate solutions that ensure greater climate resiliency and lower energy costs.
- Community members and civic stakeholders who are equal partners with public agencies to plan, design and implement future plans, policies and investments.



OUR CHALLENGE

We are in a moment when communities across the country are facing a multitude of challenges that collectively have not been felt before, and that are disproportionately felt by our lowest income households and people of color. We are losing affordable housing faster than it can be replaced, especially for those who rely on transit to reach critical destinations including jobs, clinics, schools and groceries.

We are seeing continued disinvestment in communities segregated by race and poverty despite transit access that may exist. Transit itself is in crisis. We are witnessing transit ridership plummeting as the health pandemic rages on, forcing local agencies to make

impossible service and fare policy decisions that severely affect the livelihoods of riders and the economic prosperity of regions. We are facing a growing climate crisis that cannot be overcome without increased availability of reliable and affordable transit options, of utilizing green and sustainable building design, and of preserving green and open space within the public realm accessible by transit. We are living in a time when community voice and agency has never been more important, yet is also challenged by insufficient funding, social isolation and segregation, and reliance on technical over community expertise.

WHAT DOES ETOD MEAN?

To achieve EQUITY, policy makers at all levels of government must acknowledge and build political power and agency for residents and business owners in all aspects of designing, planning and implementation of ETOD. This requires taking intentional steps to both correct past racially unjust systems and investments, and to ensure future systems and investments create and retain economic opportunities for Black and Brown residents and under-invested communities.

To ensure TRANSIT is safe, reliable and affordable for all essential riders, we need cities, regions, states and the federal government to provide financial resources necessary to maintain reliable, affordable and regular transit service. Transit is facing an unprecedented crisis today. Free or greatly reduced fares must be part of transit recovery for our most vulnerable members of society who rely on transit for critical services and jobs.

To stabilize neighborhoods, policy makers and designers must **ORIENT** investments beyond the station or bus stop to build community wealth and maximize community benefit. Transit-oriented communities require investments to improve walkability, preserve affordable housing, retain community culture, and support local business development that go beyond a single station or project. Community is at the center of ETOD. Local land use and zoning policies and TOD funding programs should be defined to encompass the area within one-half mile of a fixed rail station or one-fourth mile from a high frequency bus stop.

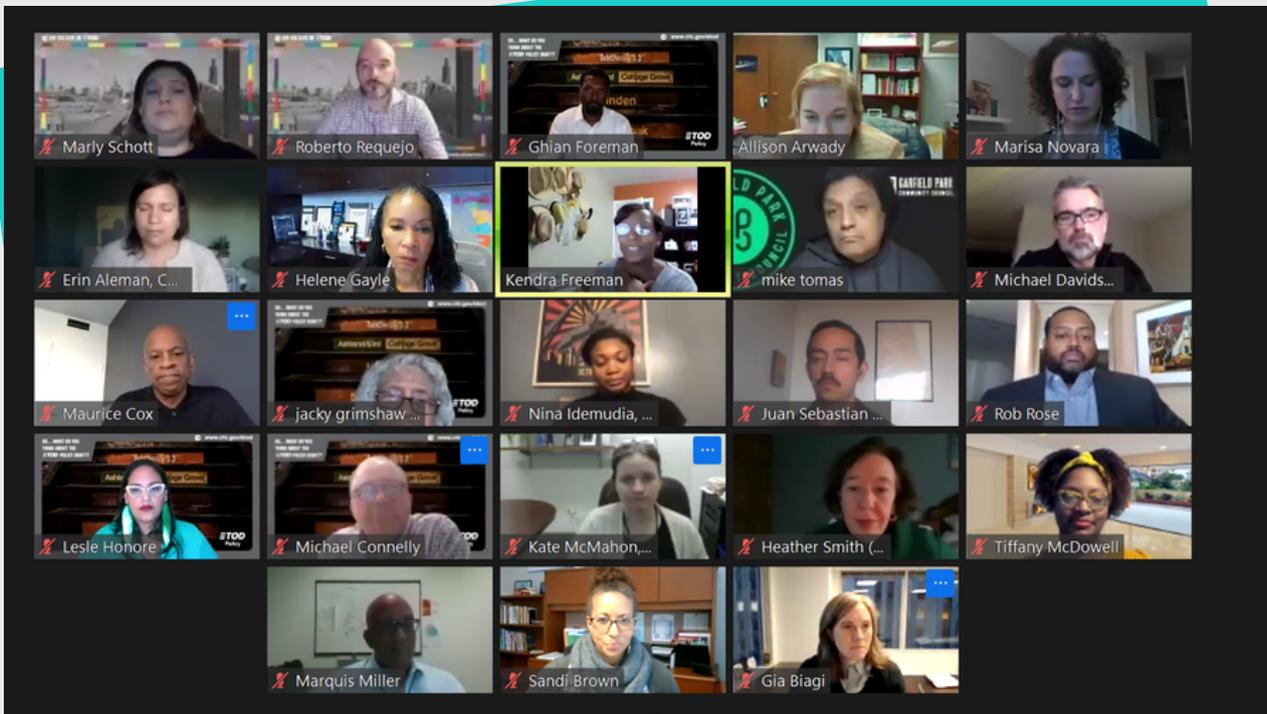
To create equitable DEVELOPMENT, project investment and design should advance community needs. Affordable housing is a key element but not the only aspect of ETOD. Transit oriented communities need access to grocery stores, daycare centers, business incubators, public health centers, workforce training centers, parks and open space. We need a comprehensive concept of ETOD projects and processes in place to ensure that any project is maximized to achieve community benefits, with financial incentives appropriately aligned and shaped through equitable community engagement.





The most rewarding part of our work bringing together community leaders, government representatives, and developers, is when we see open communication of community frustrations about the injustices they are subject to, power players acknowledging their active and passive role in policies and decisions that deeply hurt communities of color, and firm commitments to repair the damage done being realized. This trust-building process is the hardest and most fragile part of the work, but it is also the foundation without which enduring equitable development is not possible.

Roberto Requejo,
Elevated Chicago



The Leadership Council of Elevated Chicago includes City Commissioners, Mayor's Office representatives and other government and community leaders, and meets periodically to monitor the City's commitment to equitable transit-oriented development" (Source: Elevated Chicago, December 2020)

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

We recognize that successful ETOD must include design and planning strategies that support climate resiliency and energy efficiency, improve public health outcomes, and create community wealth-building opportunities, especially for BIPOC and people of different genders, ages, abilities, and incomes. The preservation and stabilization of homes and businesses for low-income members of our Black and Brown communities who are connected by transit is foundational to ETOD.¹

ETOD goals intersect with goals and policy priorities of the other elements of SPARCC's policy platform. In addition to the policy priorities being advanced by SPARCC partners at the local and national levels for restorative and regenerative economies, for housing, and for parks and open space equity, SPARCC is also focused on the following five specific ETOD policy areas:

1. Proactive Actions Required to Prevent Displacement

As TOD policies and projects have been implemented across the country, the investment of major transit improvements and new development have spurred gentrification, leading in some areas to the displacement of low-income communities and small businesses as land values rise, rents increase and cultural identities of communities change. People of color have been the most impacted by displacement pressures within transit-served areas. Many communities, such as Chicago and Denver, have seen a precipitous loss of Black and Brown households and businesses in TOD neighborhoods. Intentional policies are required and should be developed in parallel to new transit planning with the most impacted BIPOC residents and businesses.

Local land use, zoning and housing policies should be evaluated and modified to **ensure that new development increases housing production** serving households across a range of incomes, that **affordable housing** is

preserved, and that tenants and small businesses are **protected from rent gouging, evictions without just cause**, and that **improved transit service** takes their needs into account to maximize benefit. We advocate for policies to preserve **long-term affordability**, including local action to **fund community land trusts and other community ownership models** for commercial and housing uses within transit served areas. We also advocate for right-of-first refusal policies to **preserve market-rate affordable rental housing** near transit corridors, and to **prioritize the use of public lands near transit for community uses**. *(For more specifics, see the housing section of the SPARCC policy platform).*

To **identify potential impacts** and mitigation efforts, a **racial, climate and health equity screen** should be applied to TOD policies as they are being developed and implemented in communities, not just for housing, policies but across other areas such as parking and land use policies that are often reformed as part of TOD implementation.

¹ SPARCC has developed additional materials [articulating ETOD and the work of local partners](#); and the necessary elements of [successful ETOD implementation](#).



2. Elevate Equity in Federal TOD Programs

Nationally, SPARCC supports efforts at the federal level to recognize that TOD is an important transportation and housing strategy, but that it must be centered on equity. [During 2019-2020, several bills were introduced in Congress to advance TOD.](#) We look forward to working with federal policy makers in the new Congress and new Biden-Harris Administration championing ETOD policies, programs and funding.

We align with efforts to specifically allow the use of transportation resources to support affordable housing near transit and to align transportation and land use with housing and economic development planning. We advocate for resources provided directly to affordable housing developers, community development corporations and CDFIs to provide communities with needed resources through TOD grants or TIFIA/RRIF loans.

Federal TOD funding must require a strong commitment to supporting affordable housing and other community serving needs such as access to public health facilities. Housing is an

essential but not the only important element of ETOD. We advocate for defining ETOD to encompass more than affordable housing, but to also include workforce development, economic development, and access to parks, open space, health care facilities, grocery stores, schools and other community-serving needs. LA Metro's definition of Transit Oriented Communities provides a powerful example of this.² We do not support allocating scarce federal TOD resources to market-rate or luxury housing. As transportation and infrastructure bills move through Congress, we will monitor and weigh in, as appropriate, to amplify these priorities.

Locally, we believe that **affordable housing should be required** within any new multi-family housing development. We support the creation of **anti-displacement plans** as a condition for transit expansion, for utilizing public funding or tax credits, or for upzoning regulatory changes. Funding to **include the arts in the design and planning of ETOD projects**, including transit stations and as specifically eligible, use of transportation and community development funds to center culture and place-keeping within eTOD projects and neighborhoods.

² "Transit Oriented Communities (TOCs) are places (such as corridors or neighborhoods) that, by their design, allow people to drive less and access transit more. A Transit Oriented Community maximizes equitable access to a multi-modal transit network as a key organizing principle of land use planning and holistic community development. TOCs differ from Transit Oriented Development (TOD) in that a TOD is a specific building or development project that is fundamentally shaped by close proximity to transit. TOCs promote equity and sustainable living in a diversity of community contexts by: (a) offering a mix of uses that support transit ridership of all income levels (e.g. housing, jobs, retail, services and recreation); (b) ensuring appropriate building densities, parking policies, and urban design that support accessible neighborhoods connected by multimodal transit; (c) elevating needs of vulnerable users and their safety in design; and (d) ensuring that transit-related investments provide equitable benefits that serve local, disadvantaged and underrepresented communities." [2019 - METRO TRANSIT ORIENTED COMMUNITIES POLICY - Metro Transit Oriented Communities](#)



3. Adequately Fund Transit

Nationally, SPARCC supports efforts at the federal level and will lend our voice to communications and advocacy that center on the value of transit to provide essential mobility, especially to low-income riders. Those who rely on transit to participate in the regional economy are essential riders. In our messaging on transit advocacy, our priority is placed on riders first, and transit workers second. For both, we support investments and policies that maintain public health, continuation of service for essential riders, and affordable or free fares.

We call on Congress to enact a bold and transformative federal transportation funding bill that adequately funds transit, and provides resources and flexibility to local communities to make investments that **improve the safety and accessibility for pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users**. Achieving this will require public subsidy for operating assistance and prioritization of routes that serve those who most rely on transit to connect them to health

centers, grocery stores, and other essential services and regionally important jobs. We support **enacting reforms to the federal transit capital improvement program** that expedite project delivery without sacrificing community engagement.

Federal transportation funding should be reformed to provide parity, at a minimum, between transit and highway funding. SPARCC sites are working locally to advance funding opportunities within their city and state budgets to adequately fund transit, and to provide affordable or free fares.

Equally important, we call on federal agencies to **require racial, climate and health equity assessments** to be applied to major transportation and housing investments funded by the federal government, and for the federal government to establish a shared set of climate resilient building standards.



Photo Credit: Transformation Alliance and Soccer in the Streets

4. Redefine Safety

All people, regardless of their gender, age, color or income deserve to feel safe riding transit, walking to or from transit, and living in their communities. In most communities, the answer to improving safety has been to increase police presence on the transit system or to hire private security guards for new TOD projects. Yet these actions, along with increased enforcement of fare evasion and loitering, contribute to racial profiling and increased incarceration rates for Black and Brown people. A lack of safety can derive from over policing or police violence; from community violence; or from systemic violence including sexual harassment of women and transgender people. SPARCC partners in Los Angeles, for instance, are working with their transit agency, LA Metro, to rethink how it defines and responds to transit safety.

We believe that defining and addressing solutions to improve safety within ETODs must be **centered on the inherent dignity of those who ride transit and live in TODs**, especially the most vulnerable, so that all feel safe and welcome. Locally and nationally, SPARCC supports efforts to [reimagine safety and re-align budgets](#) to take a more comprehensive safety approach. This includes specific local actions such as **funding mental and public health professionals** to help respond to transit safety needs. This could include funding **programs to activate transit spaces with artists**, to include **programming for teens**, and to partner with **supportive housing and other social service providers**. Federal transit funding should be created to innovate and pilot these new approaches to improve public safety on transit with **community-driven, non-law enforcement methods**. Further, we believe in the alignment of transit and ETOD safety indicators and approaches with **state and local efforts to reduce transportation fatalities** and severe injuries such as through “Vision Zero” and “Complete Streets.”

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5. Resource Community-Based Organizations

Successful ETOD requires local changes to land use, zoning, parking, and a myriad of other regulations and programs both in the planning and in the implementation stages. BIPOC communities are best positioned to speak to their own needs and develop solutions when resourced and when public-sector led processes specifically require their engagement. Locally, governments should **allocate at least 10% of project or planning budgets specifically for community-based organizing and engagement**. We advocate for this to become standard engagement practice.

Inclusion of artists, storytellers, and other creative engagement practices all must be eligible activities valued as part of equitable community engagement. Intentional effort should be given to **meaningfully engage those with disabilities and those for whom English is not their primary language**. Public agencies should **create community engagement staffing** positions; formalize processes that **standardize equitable engagement practices** across agencies and departments; and **recognize the value of cultural competency, mediation and facilitation** skills within their staff.

³ For more information on Vision Zero see <https://visionzeronetwork.org/about/what-is-vision-zero/> and for Complete Streets visit <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/program/national-complete-streets-coalition/publications/what-are-complete-streets/>





**ACT-LA
members after
a LA Metro
Board meeting**

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Our vision is that every Angeleno has access to free, convenient and efficient public transit and quality, safe housing. We believe LA Metro's \$160 billion expansion - if done with a firm commitment to equity and in partnership with communities of color - is a game-changing opportunity to prioritize racial and economic justice, expand access to affordable housing, and transition the region to an economy of opportunity for BIPOC.

Laura Raymond,
Alliance for Community Transit, Los Angeles



Photo: Brian Keith Elison, and Residents of Garfield Park

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE EQUITY

WE believe in a future where urban parks and open spaces are re-imagined and designed by communities as communal spaces for the benefit of supporting people’s physical and mental health and creating climate resilient, thriving, equitable neighborhoods. We see communities thriving in health, climate, and cultural resilience with ample access to community-designed recreational and natural spaces that strengthen the continuity of a neighborhood’s long-term economic stability for residents.

OUR CHALLENGE

City, regional and national parks and open spaces too often reflect racist and classist attitudes - both conscious and unconscious - of the agencies planning, designing, programming and maintaining them. This results in an exclusion of the diverse communities these parks and open spaces can and should serve, creating the physical, spiritual or cultural displacement of people from the land for extraction and profit.

Deep and authentic community engagement from the outset is necessary but missing in the siting, design, development and operations process of public recreational and natural spaces. As a consequence, the well-being of so many generations of low-income communities of color in this country have been negatively and unjustly impacted. This historical and current lack of community engagement, particularly in

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Greenspace preservation/restoration is no longer just a conservation issue; it now is social and cultural.

Darryl Haddock, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance



Black and other communities of color, including immigrant, and low-income communities, has resulted in a stark lack of open space, parks and green investment in these places, creating generations of negative impacts on these communities’ health, well-being and cultural resilience.

Decision-makers at all levels continue to face growing environmental challenges from urban flooding and the growing threat of the urban heat island effect, yet change is slow to come. Climate change will exacerbate these impacts, especially in already overwhelmed existing infrastructure systems, where there is less parkland and greenspace, including fewer resources for their maintenance and amenities. These are all conditions that only perpetuate the deep-rooted environmental and social injustices in the country.



Given that COVID-19 has further underscored the urgency of equitable greenspace investments to allow people to safely utilize outdoor space, interventions that provide multiple co-benefits and explicitly consider climate justice are needed to manage stormwater, reduce heat-health impacts, and increase economic opportunity.

Lastly, parks and affordable housing sectors have worked independently of each other, which has resulted in the creation of green development inadvertently leading to the displacement of long-time residents, physically or culturally, from their homes, businesses and communities. Given these historical disconnections, we must be more intentional in prioritizing equity, community-driven development, and spatial justice for holistic, safe, and culturally connected parks and open spaces from the very beginning of each project.

FOCUS AREAS

Community-led Parks Design, Development & Implementation.

Uplifting strategies that prioritize community voices and self-determination in parks design (e.g., park site selection, design processes, operations).

Equitable Parks Systems.

Advocating for existing parks systems, departments and consultants to engage in anti-racist education and systems change to equip themselves to better communicate and interact with diverse communities.

Green Investments for Resilient Neighborhoods.

Ensuring that investments for parks and open spaces in underserved communities are coordinated with community-driven anti-displacement strategies. Ensure that public, private and philanthropic funding and capital are aligned to ensure multiple, integrated benefits including climate and social resilience.

Photo Credit: Transformation Alliance and Soccer in the Streets



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Park agencies at the local, regional and federal levels need to start with communities and continue to center communities throughout the design process. Community organizations that have established trust with neighbors and residents should be recognized and supported as key resources in planning and decision-making.

Investments for green infrastructure, including for parks and open spaces, should enhance a community's resilience, not harm it. There is a clear need for increased investment for green and climate infrastructure, particularly through parks and open space development, so that underserved communities are able to withstand worsening climate impacts. It is critical that these investments are created in tandem with affordable housing and increased economic opportunity while also being designed with community voices to prevent against the potential for gentrification and displacement.

1. Community-led Parks Design, Development and Implementation

Community organizations that represent residents and local priorities focused on building parks programs need to be elevated and supported to ensure integration of community voices in regional park planning offices and programs. Policy recommendations to support community-led parks design include:

SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS

Convene community-based leaders and advocates for equitable urban parks and open space planning who understand community needs and can respond to political pressures at multiple levels affecting the community.

Amplify experiences and tools that recognize and address past and present injustices in parks and open space planning. For example:

- Honor indigenous and traditional uses of the land
- Ensure that spaces are not criminalized (for instance, including for homeless people and street vendors)

Share, identify, and co-create tools that support the prioritization of land acquisition and development of integrated parks, affordable housing, and climate resilient infrastructure that is community-owned and stewarded as well as addresses existing vulnerabilities and inequities.

Identify pathways (e.g., target audiences, platforms) **for increased community engagement** in park planning processes at local, regional and federal levels. Ensure that community members are compensated for participating in the design, development and implementation of parks and related programs/projects.

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

Spotlight, celebrate, and promote best practices in integrated, equitable, and community-driven parks design systems.

Create tools and programs that support community needs and local parks infrastructure but do not contribute to displacement.



2. Equitable Park Systems

To recognize and address the historic inequities in parks and related development processes, creating space for conversation and anti-racist trainings for park agencies at the local, regional, and federal levels will be key in building the awareness and respect needed to engage, involve, and collaborate with communities. Policy recommendations to improve on existing parks systems to center communities include:

SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS

Identify anti-racist programs/workshops to build awareness in park agencies, planners, and the public in recognizing the historic and current racism embedded within the park design infrastructure that has and continues to negatively impact Black and indigenous communities of color.

Identify and promote case examples of a park agency process at each of the local, regional, and federal levels that implement a participatory budgeting process and increased community engagement planning processes for further learning and evolution.

Identify and spotlight metrics that assess the impact of parks on community livelihoods as a means of avoiding disproportionate impacts, as well as to address unintended racial equity consequences (such as higher housing costs or displacement).

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

Identify and promote reparations to cover funding gaps (e.g. Asheville N.C.) rather than through taxes and utility rate-paying to fund transportation, jobs and park improvements to improve quality of life for low-income communities in proximity to parks.

Advocate for private and philanthropic funding to be invested in systemic park improvements.

Advocate for a proportionate annual regional parks budget or at least 50% of the annual regional parks budget for the next 10 years be dedicated to the long-term maintenance and beautification of public park spaces in underserved regions that support affordable housing.

3. Green Investments for Resilient Neighborhoods

Policy recommendations to re-envision community-serving green investments for the purposes of promoting resilient neighborhoods include:

SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS

Identify and support a local coordinating entity to consistently link green investments with investments in affordable housing, economic opportunity, and other community needs.

Pinpoint and promote areas for cross-collaboration between parks departments and housing departments to ensure that green investments do not contribute to displacement.

Identify opportunities and pathways for park agencies to divest from fossil fuels.

Elevate and support the integration of equity, open space and parks in federal, state and local programs and legislation (including CDBG, FEMA, Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and other actions). Ensure that community-based organizations can equitably and effectively access and implement programmatic resources and funding.



LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

Increase capital for green infrastructure that leads to economic stability and opportunity, not to displacement. Support a process for scaling these types of projects.

Identify and spotlight programs for local workforce development and hiring for parks and open spaces through green infrastructure training programs that culminate in job placement in green infrastructure.

Develop innovative collaborations with park systems, investors and NGO's to establish markets: micro and macro enterprises, such as outfitters, vendors, food venues, refreshment stands and entertainment and arts providers that help build and support local wealth. (e.g. park vending issues, [efforts that sustain economies](#)).

Identify and implement strategies to encourage multi-benefit outcomes for private and public sector parks development, e.g., local/targeted hiring, and partnerships with other agencies to provide a broad range of community services.



Photo Credit: West Atlanta Watershed Alliance

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The process is just as important as the outcome!

Na'Taki Osborne Welks,
West Atlanta Watershed Alliance





OUR BELOVED COMMUNITY

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in community, our potential is truly realized. what we have to offer to each other is not merely critique, anger, commentary, ownership and false power. we have the capacity to hold each other, serve each other, heal each other, create for and with each other, forgive each other, and liberate ourselves and each other.

these are not new thoughts; this is what beloved community means. it is what we all long for, and what we all need.

~ adrienne marie brown, [in relationship with others](#)

Unprecedented times call for bold and transformative policies that can help mold the foundations of our communities for generations to come. Transitioning our institutions and policies to those that integrate people first can help mitigate pain and suffering. Creating sustainable, restorative and distributive policies offers communities a more regenerative way forward and ensures the creation of wealth that builds over generations.

We recognize that this is not work to be done alone. Our values and policy recommendations are shared by many other national, state, regional and local organizations and cross-sector collaborations. We seek to continue to expand our partnerships with aligned organizations to realize a more racially just, climate responsive and healthy future for all. Each and every one of us must continue to envision what a racially just society could look like — one where each person's life is sacred, valued and beloved — and adapt toward it.



Photo Credit: SPARCC (top & bottom)

WHO WE ARE

The Strong, Prosperous and Resilient Communities Challenge (SPARCC) is a multiyear initiative investing in and amplifying local efforts in Atlanta, the San Francisco Bay Area, Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles and Memphis to ensure that public investments in the built environment reduce racial disparities, build a culture of health, and respond to the climate crisis. The initiative's long-term goal is to change the way metropolitan regions grow, invest, and build through integrated, cross-sector approaches that benefit low-income people and communities of color. SPARCC offers flexible grant funding, technical assistance, and a community of practice to support innovative solutions that advance racial equity, health, and climate resilience. SPARCC is powered by national and local partners and is an initiative of Enterprise Community Partners, Low Income Investment Fund, and Natural Resources Defense Council, with funding from Ballmer Group, JPB Foundation, Kresge Foundation, and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The SPARCC network has more than 300 organizations, plus allies including groups like the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and Metro Denver Nature Alliance, which supported the Parks and Open Space Equity recommendations.

Visit us at <https://www.sparcchub.org/> and follow us on Twitter [@sparcchub](https://twitter.com/sparcchub).



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